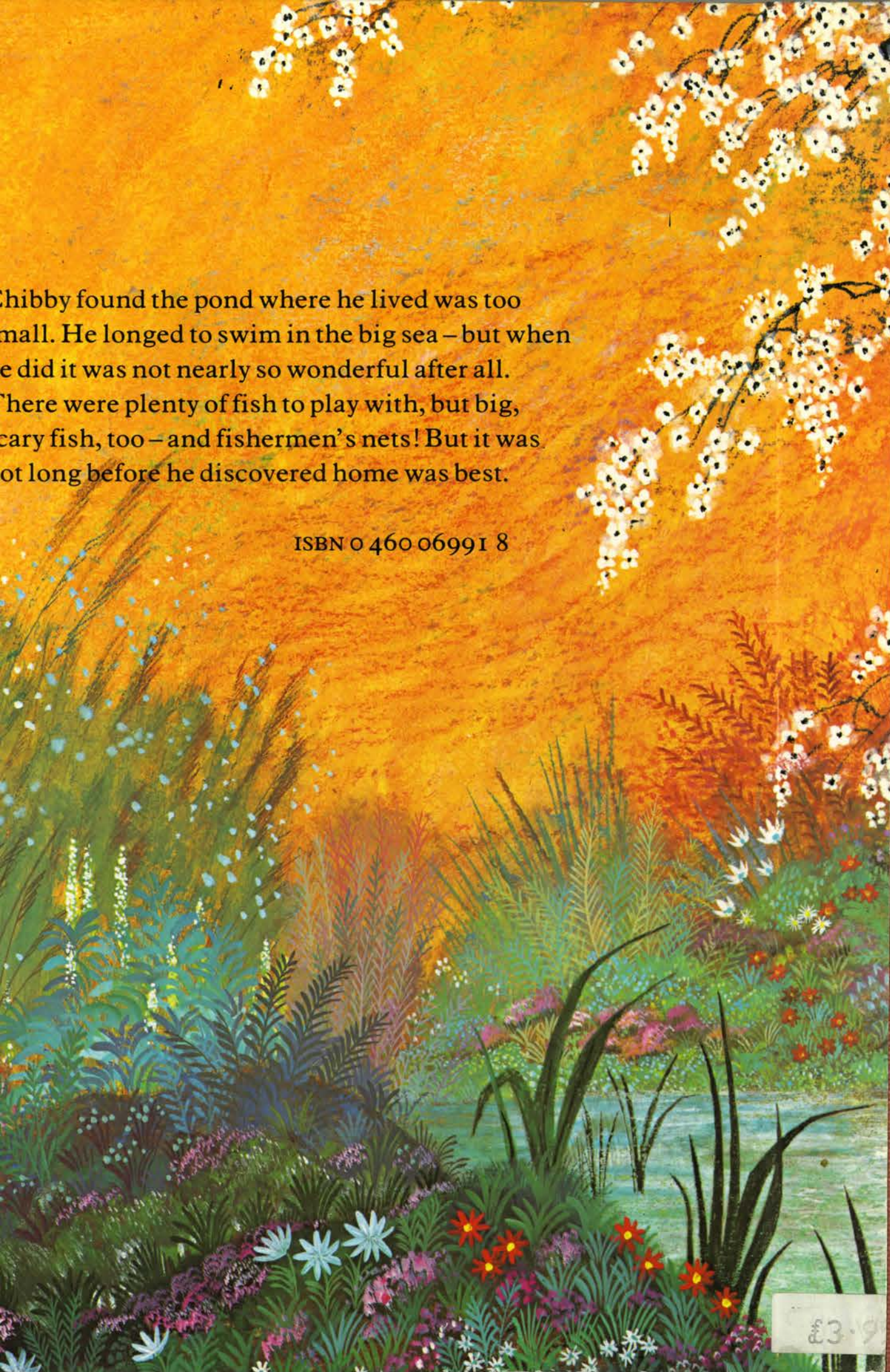


Chibby found the pond where he lived was too small. He longed to swim in the big sea – but when he did it was not nearly so wonderful after all. There were plenty of fish to play with, but big, scary fish, too – and fishermen's nets! But it was not long before he discovered home was best.

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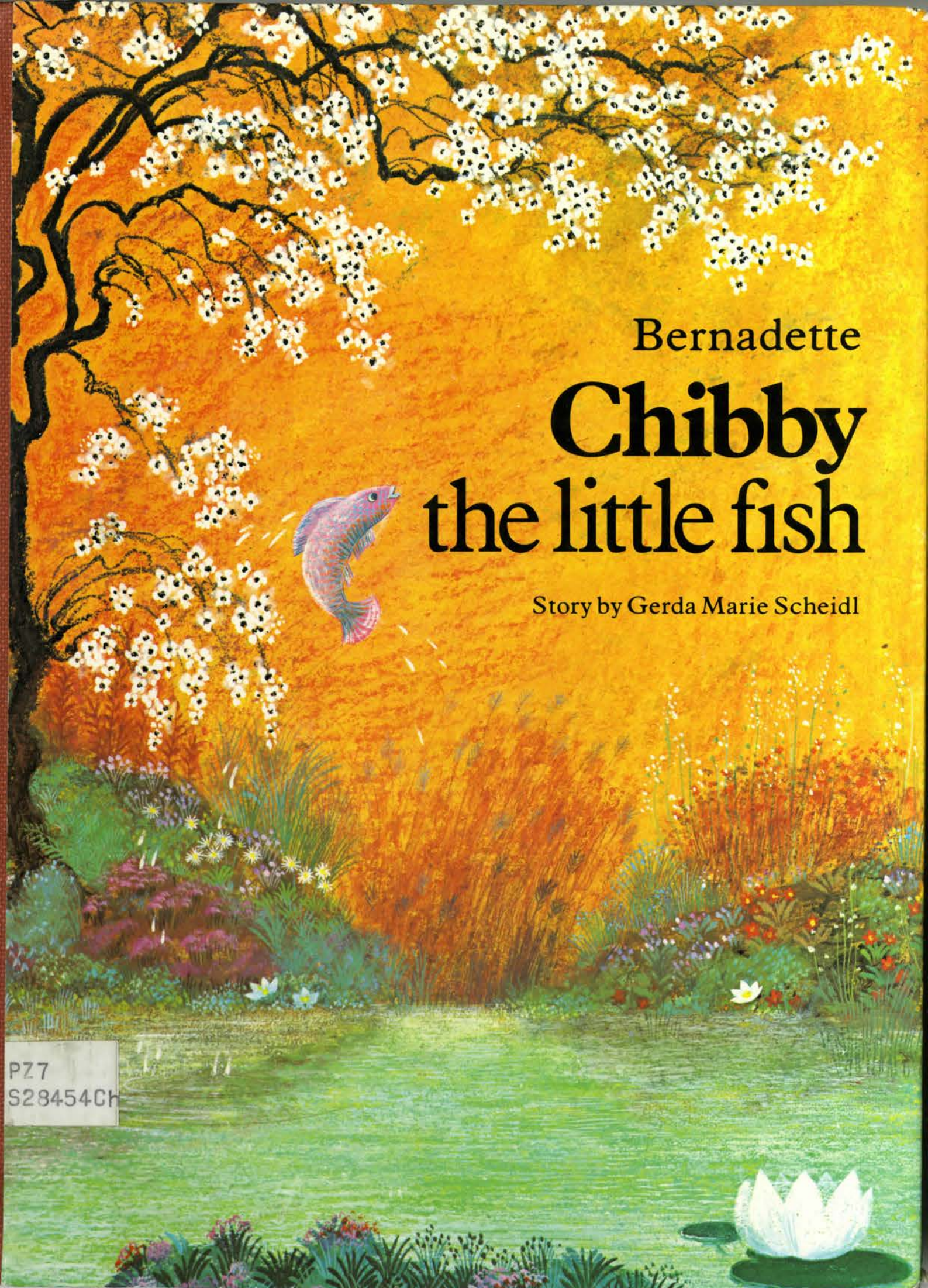


Bernadette
Chibby
the little fish

Story by Gerda Marie Scheidl

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Story by Gerda Marie Scheidl
Translated by Gwen Marsh

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Long ago, in Japan, the land of the Rising Sun, there lived a man called Mr Yamada. In the middle of his garden was a lily pond where a little fish swam among the leaves of the waterlilies. He was a most beautiful fish with scales that sparkled like jewels.

Mr Yamada and the fish were friends. Mr Yamada called the fish Chibby, which means 'little one' in Japanese.

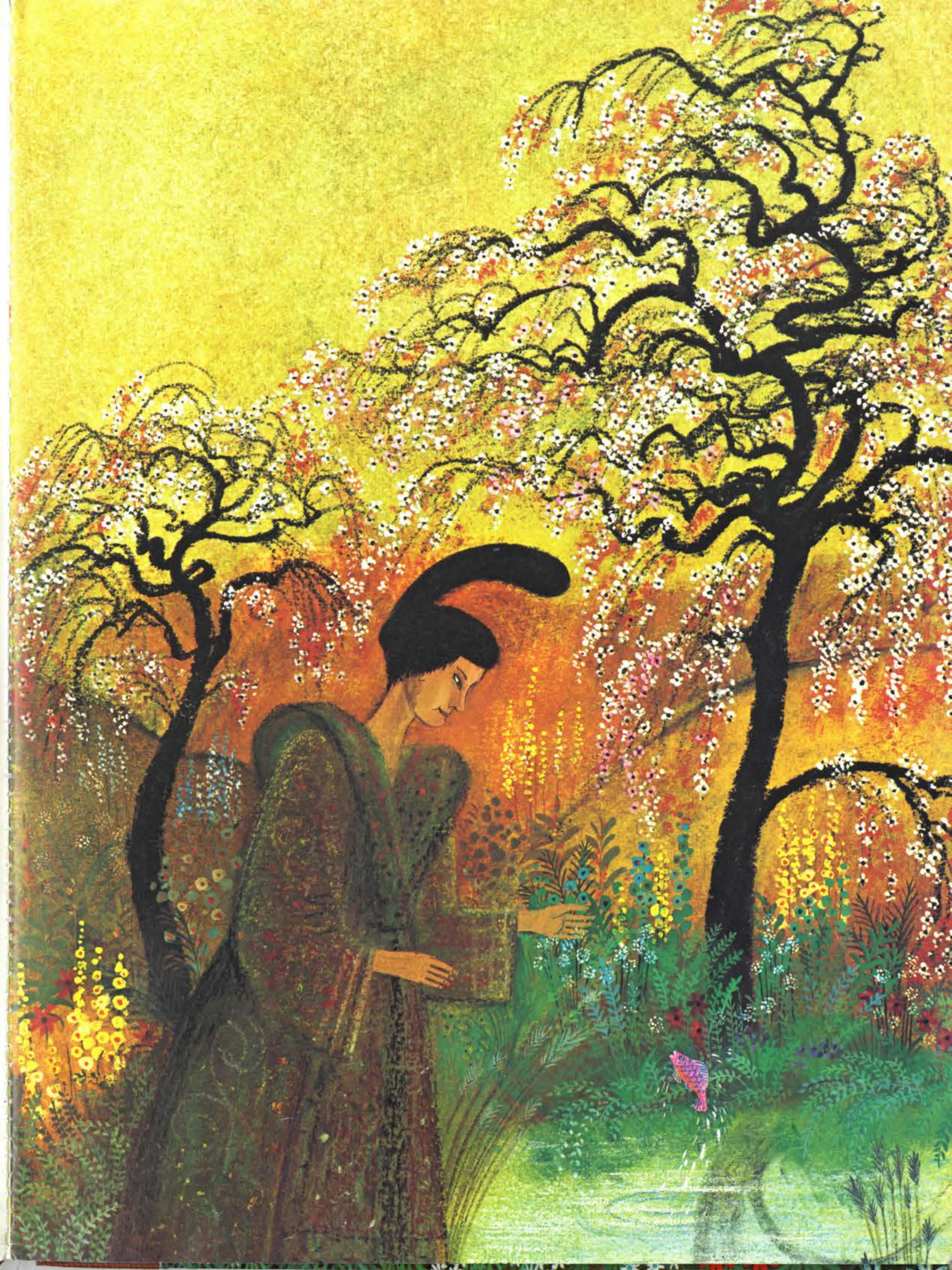
The pond was small, so Chibby could not swim far. But that did not matter to him – he was happy. Every morning, when Mr Yamada came down to the lily pond he greeted Chibby with a friendly smile and said, 'Good morning.' Chibby replied with a stream of bubbles. The two friends always understood each other.

'Watch me!' Chibby cried. 'Look what I can do!' and he blew hundreds of bubbles up through the water.

'Wonderful!' Mr Yamada said, laughing.

'I can do lots of things! Look!' and Chibby jumped high in the air, then – splash – he did a bellyflop back into the water.

Mr Yamada clapped his hands with pleasure. The two friends had lots of fun together.





Every evening Mr Yamada came to the lily pond to wish his little friend good night. But Chibby gave him no peace until Mr Yamada told him a story.

One evening, when the moon was high in the sky, Mr Yamada told a story about the great wide sea near his garden, and the boats with coloured sails that skimmed over the waves.



'Why don't the sailing boats come to visit me in my pond?' Chibby wanted to know.

'Because your pond is much too small,' Mr Yamada told him.

'The sea is very, very big.'

'Bigger than my pond?' asked Chibby, amazed.

'Much bigger.'

'If it's bigger, I want to swim in it, not here where I keep bumping into the banks.'

'But the sea is full of dangers, little Chibby,' said Mr Yamada, anxiously.

'I am not afraid. I want to swim in the sea.'

'You mean you really want to leave?' asked Mr Yamada, sadly.

'Do you really think other places could be nicer, Chibby? Just stop and think a minute.'

Chibby did not want to think. 'I do not like living in the pond any more,' he said, and dashed wildly around without any thought for the lilies.

Mr Yamada sighed. 'All right, if you do not like it here with me any longer, Chibby, I'll grant your wish and take you to the sea.'

Mr Yamada fetched a bowl made of precious jade. He filled it with water from the pond and put a lily leaf in it. Then he called, 'Come, Chibby, I'm ready!'

Chibby darted like an arrow into the bowl and hid under the leaf. Suddenly he felt a little nervous.



Mr Yamada carried Chibby in the bowl very carefully to the sea. He looked sadly at the huge expanse of water where Chibby was determined to seek adventure, and said, 'How fortunate that you are the sort of fish that can live in both fresh and salt water, Chibby, otherwise I would have had to refuse your wish. So here we are, little friend. Here is the big sea!'

Full of curiosity, Chibby looked out from under the lily leaf. There indeed was a big sea, and with a gulp and flick he leapt up and dived head first into the water.

'Good luck, Chibby!' cried Mr Yamada, 'May the sun and the moon always watch over you!'

So Mr Yamada said goodbye to his friend as he turned away from the sea.

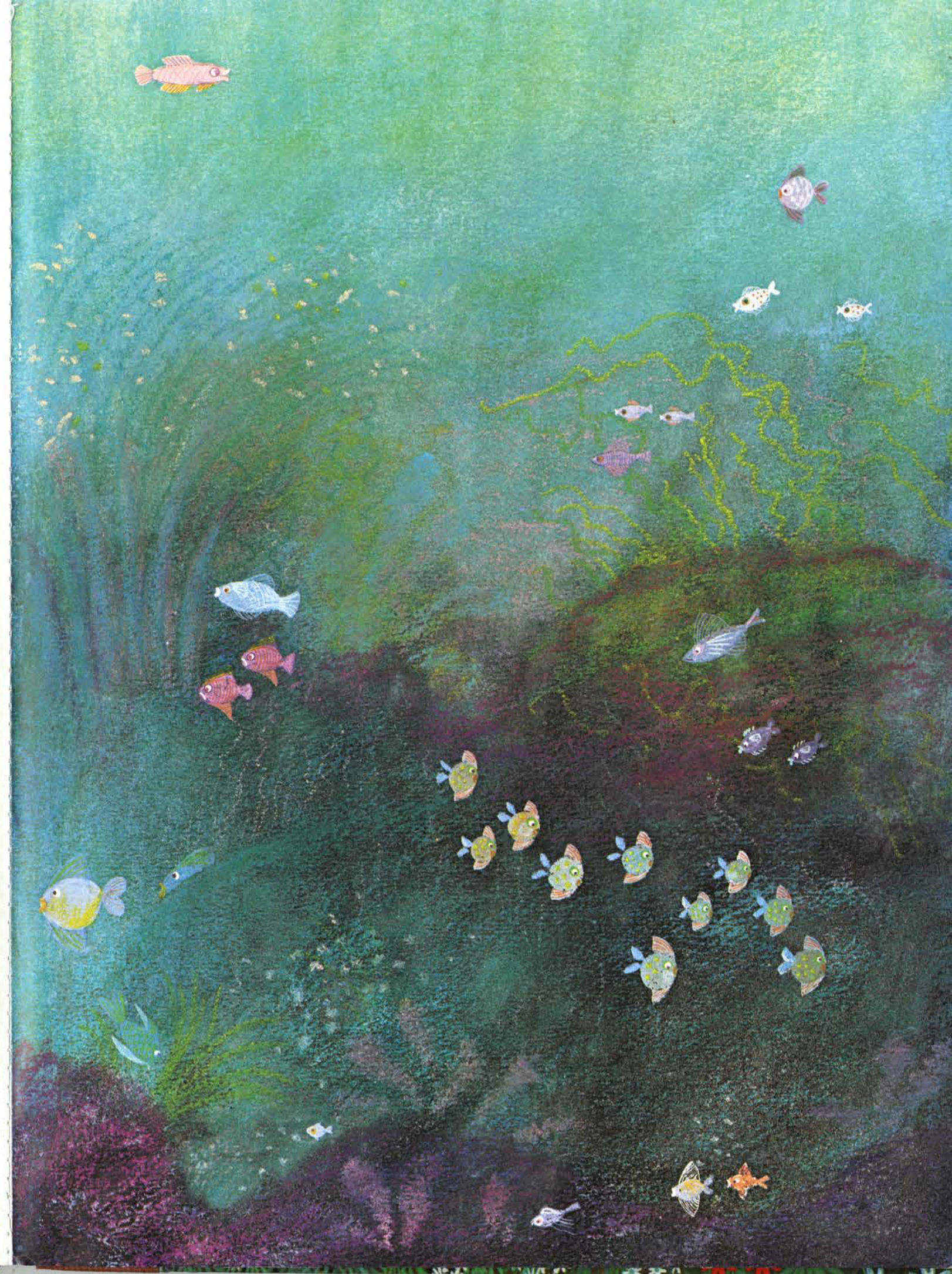


Chibby did not hear Mr Yamada's words of farewell. 'I'm in the sea, I'm in the sea!' he thought excitedly. 'The water tastes delicious and I can swim wherever I like.' Darting down to the sea-bed, he found himself in a wonderful place: graceful plants and corals glowed in rainbow colours. Crimson ferns unfurled like feathers. Sea anemones rocked gently in the current. Chibby had never seen anything so beautiful. At home in the pond there were only waterlilies, while here in the sea he could swim through a whole garden of flowers and never come to the end of it.

Chibby met lots of fishes too. 'Hallo! Hallo! I'm Chibby. May I play with you?'

'Come on, come with us!' The fishes flicked their tails and darted in among the coral and seaweed. In high spirits Chibby gave chase. What a wonderful game! In and out of the plants he flashed.

Suddenly the other fishes vanished. Where had they gone? Into the dark cave? Chibby swam closer. Oh! Whatever was that, crouching in the half-light? A monster!



The monster was an enormous cuttlefish. He looked terribly fierce, and glared at poor Chibby. In a panic, the little fish turned and fled. He swam on and on until he was a long, long way from that horrible great fish.



Chibby was still trembling. Suddenly he did not like the sea any more. 'Who knows,' he thought, 'there may be other monsters lurking behind any of these rocks, waiting to catch me! I won't stay here. I'll go home to Mr Yamada.'

So Chibby turned and swam back – or so he thought. In fact he swam in the wrong direction! For days and nights he swam on and on. At last he came to an island, and here a terrible thing happened: he was caught in a net.

When the fisherman saw Chibby he cried, 'A magic fish!' for he had never seen such a beautiful fish in such fantastic colours before.

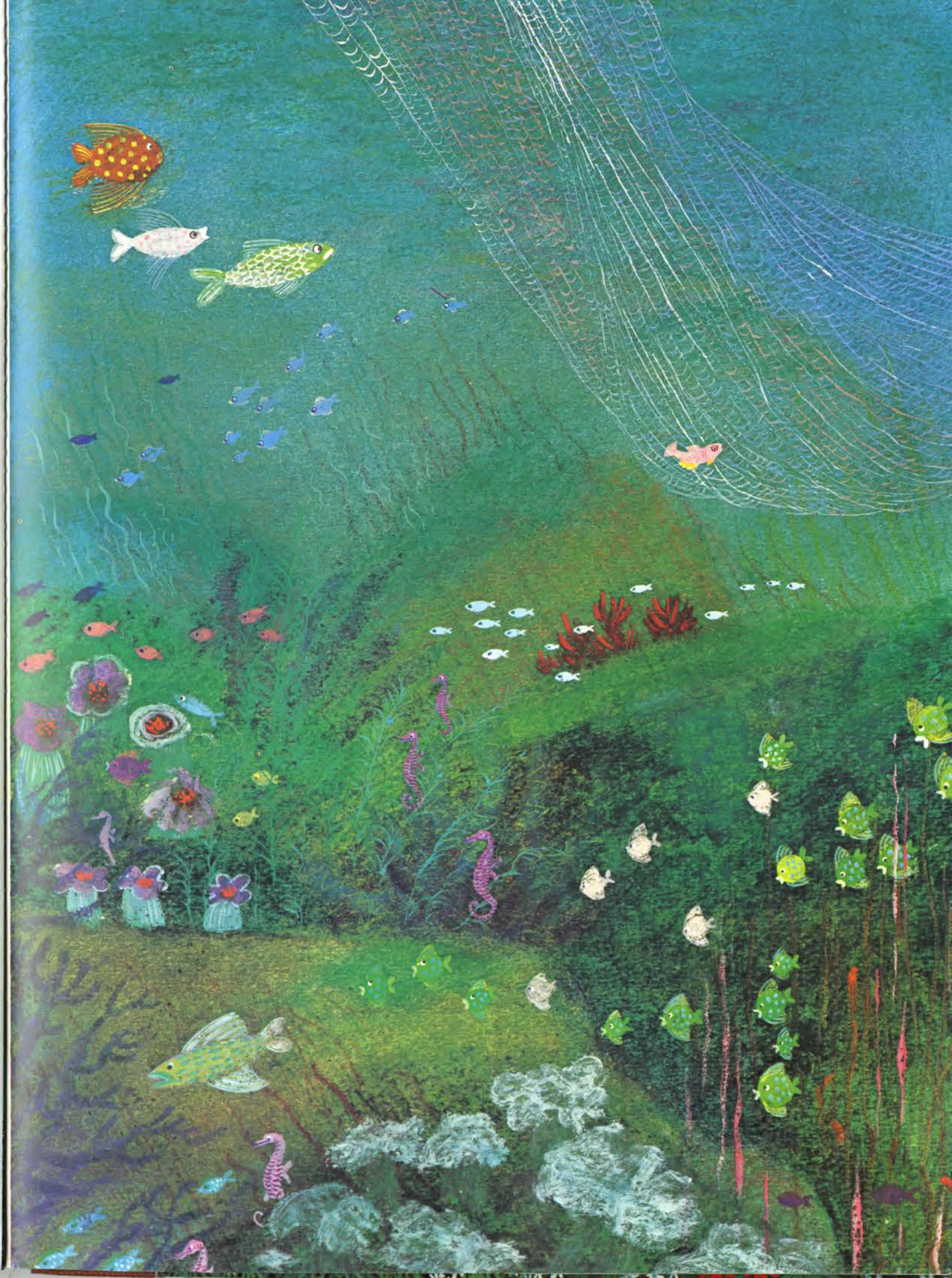
'I'm not a magic fish,' gasped Chibby. 'I'm just Chibby. Don't you understand?'

But the fisherman did not understand. He was not a friend like Mr Yamada. Quickly he pulled in the net, delighted with his catch.

'Help!' Chibby gasped for breath. 'Help!' Scared to death, he tried to slip through the net, but only became more and more entangled. The fisherman did not care. Still marvelling at the beauty of the little fish, he picked it up and ran with it to the chief of the island.

The chief also thought Chibby was a magic fish. 'I'll eat this fish, and with him inside me I shall become a great and powerful magician.' The chief rubbed his stomach and shouted: 'Into the cooking-pot with him. We'll have a feast – a magic-fish feast!'

Plop! Chibby found himself in the cooking-pot. Luckily it was full of cold, clear spring water. How terrible if it had been hot! Chibby felt giddy. Whatever was going to happen to him?





Suddenly a hollow roar rang out in the darkness. Chibby stiffened with fright.

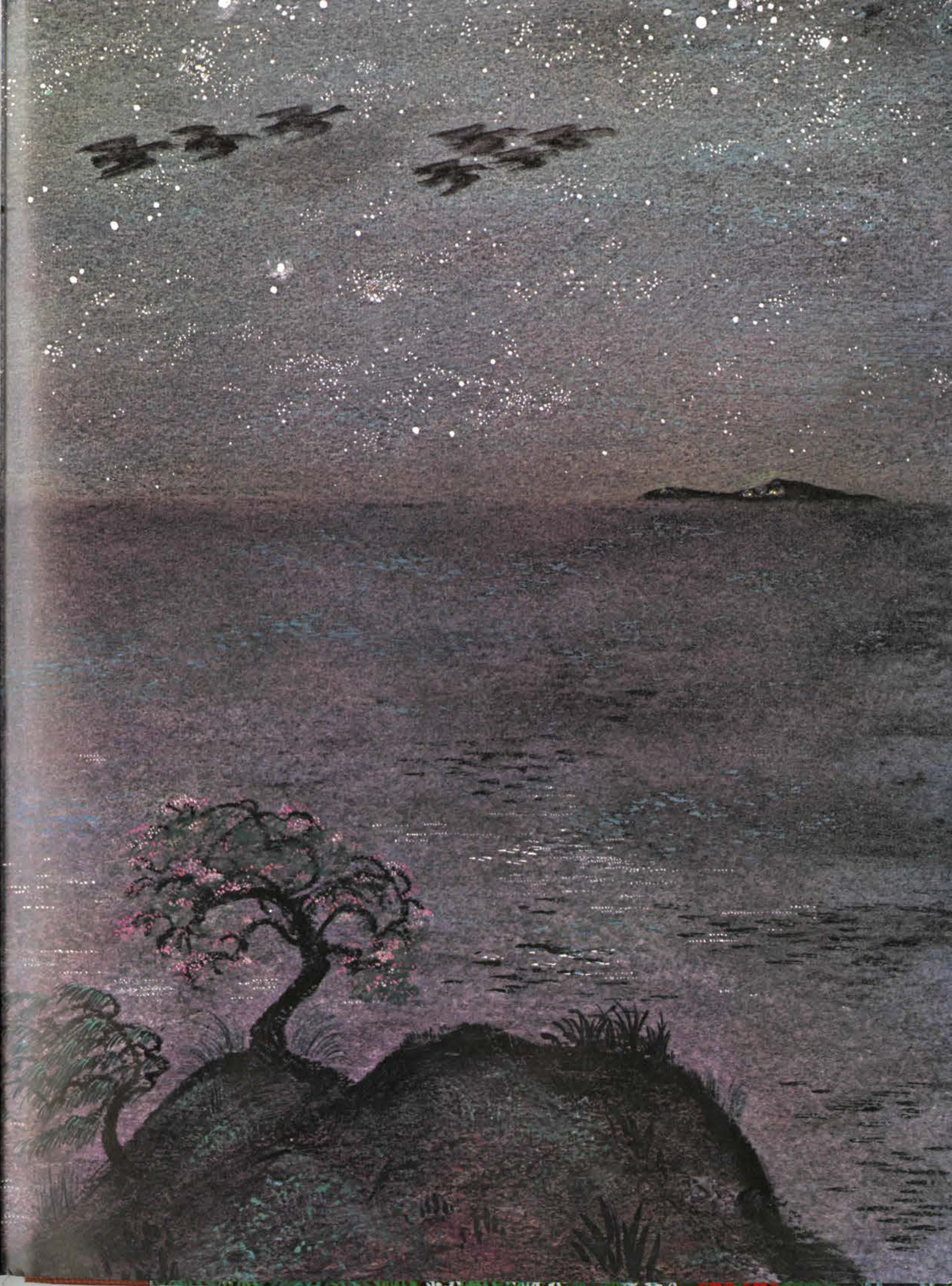
It was the chief blowing on a conch-shell to announce the beginning of the festivities. All night long the whole tribe danced and sang to the sound of tom-toms until finally the chief began to yawn. Soon, everybody else was yawning. Then the chief sank into his chair and fell asleep, and all the rest lay down and fell asleep in a heap together.

Only the thirteenth son of the chief, little Ayo, did not fall asleep. He could not stop thinking of the little fish caught in the pot. Ayo listened. Everyone was snoring. He crept over to the pot, standing on his toes to peep in. Was the magic fish dead? No. Carefully Ayo took Chibby out in a coconut shell. Chibby gulped, terrified. But Ayo laughed, for the magic fish was alive.

Quickly Ayo ran down to the bay where the fishermen's boats lay on the beach. He had often paddled a boat, though not on the open sea, and never at night. But Ayo was not afraid. His thoughts were all for the little fish he wanted to save. He put the shell down in the bottom of the boat and pushed out into the water. A big, round moon shone down on the sea, turning it to silver.

Little Ayo paddled out into the shining sea. The boat rocked on the waves, and Chibby in his coconut shell rocked too. He was afraid.

'You need not be afraid of me,' said Ayo, picking up the shell, 'I am not going to eat you. I am going to set you free.' And that is what he did. 'Be careful now,' he said, 'Don't get caught again, little fish!' and he threw Chibby into the sea. 'Quick, quick, swim home!' he cried, clapping his hands.



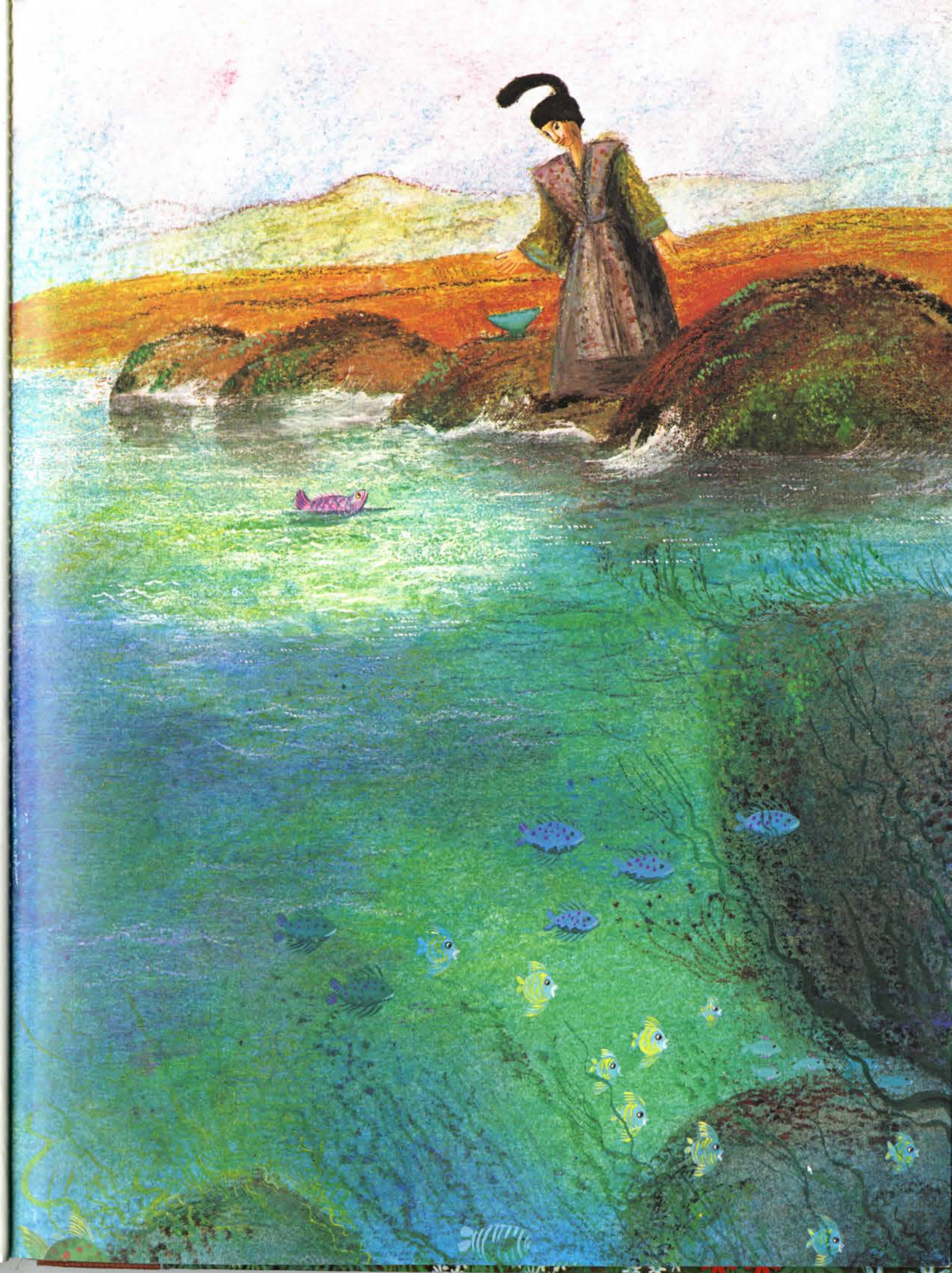
How Chibby longed for home! If only he knew which way to go! He swam around unhappily, wondering if he would ever see his friend Mr Yamada again.

Just then a huge wave rolled by and carried little Chibby away with it. It swept him along for miles and miles, over the great wide sea.

Every day Mr Yamada went down to the seashore and looked out for his friend Chibby. But the little fish never came.

Then, one morning, when there was no wind at all and the sea was calm a huge wave rolled up the beach right over his feet, and there was Chibby!

'Chibby! You've come back!' exclaimed Mr Yamada, joyfully. He bent down and held out the jade bowl. 'Come, little friend!' He did not have to ask him twice. Chibby jumped into the bowl at once, as happy as could be to be home again.



'Welcome home, Chibby!' said Mr Yamada. 'Are you glad to be here in your pond again?'

'Oh yes. I am. I like home best!' Excitedly he dived and darted around in the water. Then up he came again, blowing bubbles.

'But I like swimming in the big sea too!'

'Do you?' Mr Yamada knelt down.

'Yes, I do, even though it is dangerous sometimes. You soon forget the frightening moments. Now I only think of that beautiful garden at the bottom of the sea, and all the other fine fishes there. Will you let me see all that again some day?'

'Why not,' said Mr Yamada, kindly, 'if that is what you want?'

'Oh yes, please!'

Mr Yamada filled the jade bowl with fresh water again and placed it by the edge of the lily pond. 'There,' he said, smiling, 'now you can jump into the bowl whenever you like and I will take you to the sea.'

'But will you still be my friend?' asked Chibby, 'even if I play with the fish in the sea?'

'Of course,' replied Mr Yamada. 'We'll always be friends.'

Chibby was so excited he sped off through the water, flitting here there and flicking water all over the waterlilies with his silver tail, he was so happy.

